

UK Songwriting Festival



Lecture: Form and structure

August 06

Outline

- Elements of form
- Functions of each section
- AAA form
- AB form
- AABA form
- Variations

Elements of Form

- Intro
(usually a version of another section)
- **Verse**
- **Pre-chorus**
- **Chorus**
 - Instrumental?
(usually a version of another section)
- **Bridge (Middle eight)**
 - Outro
(usually a version of another section)

Functions of a verse

- Different lyrics, same melody each time
- Moves the 'story' along
- First line/couplet often sets the scene...
 - Who, what, where and when
 - "I met him at the candy store,
He turned around and smiled at me, you get the picture?"
 - "Wouldn't it be nice if we were older,
and we wouldn't have to wait so long"
 - A good first line can summarise the whole song
 - "You never close your eyes any more when I kiss your lips"
- Verses are generally linear in meaning

Functions of a pre-chorus

- Engages the listener, who may mistake it for a chorus
- Serves as a double hook
- ...and makes the chorus even more powerful
- Lyric often literally preparatory for the chorus
 - We gotta hold on to what we got,
Doesn't make a difference if we make it or not
We got each other and that's a lot for love...
...we'll give it a shot"
 - Rock DJ
 - Living on a Prayer
 - How Sweet it is...
 - Smile (Lily Allen)

Functions of a chorus

- Often the main 'hook'
- Identical words and melody
- Recurring between other sections
- Summarises the central idea
 - "Waterloo, I was defeated - you won the war
Waterloo, promised to love you for evermore
Waterloo, couldn't escape if I wanted to
Waterloo, knowing my fate is to be with you
Whoa, whoa whoa whoa Waterloo, finally facing my Waterloo"
- A game - EVERYBODY sing the verse of the following well-known song, but you must start singing within 2 seconds... it's...
 - The Beatles - All You Need is Love

Functions of a bridge

- An interlude to maintain interest
- Often comments on a song from another angle
 - The Beatles -
We Can Work It Out/Back in the USSR
 - "Try to see it my way...
Life is very short"
 - "Flew in from Miami Beach BOAC...
...The Ukraine Girls really knock me out"
- Optional in verse-chorus songs...
- But essential in AABA songs

3 main song forms

- AAA - same music, different words each time
 - Narrative
- AB - verse/chorus
 - Narrative and reiterative - ideal for a pop song
 - The predominant form of popular song...
 - ...though C sections are often added
- AABA - verse-verse-bridge-verse
 - The 'jazz standard' form
 - No choruses - but still well-used
- Contemporary variations -
 - AB form with C section (bridge)
 - ABC (verse/pre-chorus/chorus)
 - ABCABCD (includes bridge)

AAA form

- (same music, different lyrics)
- Very good at storytelling...
- ...but you have to get your hooks in quick!
 - All Along the Watchtower - Bob Dylan
 - Cool for Cats - Squeeze
 - Golden Brown - Stranglers
 - By The Time I Get To Phoenix - Jimmy Webb
 - 10 green bottles!
- Very rare now - and difficult to write

AABA form

- (double verse, bridge, concluding verse)
- Early part of 20th century
- Narrative, with a bridge... the hook's in the A section
- Bridge takes another angle... or narrative turn
- Often has to cycle twice or otherwise extend
 - Blue Moon; You Belong to Me; As Time Goes By etc
 - Something/I Will/Yesterday - The Beatles
 - Don't Know Why - Norah Jones
 - Will You Still Love Me Tomorrow? - Carole King
 - You Can Try - Andy West

AB form

- (ABABAB etc) - Verse/chorus
 - Dance The Night Away - Mavericks
 - She Moves in Her Own Way - Kooks
 - You Give Me Something - James Morrison (Eg White)
 - Rock DJ - Robbie Williams (Williams/Chambers) (with PC)
 - Vienna (Midge Ure)
 - Put Your Records on - Corinne Bailey Rae (with PC)
 - 50 Ways to Leave Your Lover - Paul Simon (double A)
 - Modern Girl - Dominic King (Bugatti/Musker)
 - Tempted - Squeeze
 - Cecilia Stone - Andy West
- This is the standard popular songwriting form in use today (i.e. 1960s onwards)...

Messing with form

- Variations
 - Every Breath You Take (AABA) with an extra bridge
 - Bo'Rhap - AABCA with variations
- Substituting instrumental sections
- Adding a bridge to AB songs
- BUT almost all popular music fits one of the three basic forms...
- Usually AB or AABA

Things to remember

- Successful songs often have 2 or 3 verses
- Choruses summarise overall meaning
- AB - hooks/titles in the chorus
- AABA - hooks/titles are in the verses

- Form can help to achieve ECONOMY;
- Many beginners' songs are too long!